DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 478 949 CE 085 168

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Imel, Susan |
| TITLE | Youth in Adult Basic and Literacy Education Programs. ERIC Digest. |
| INSTITUTION | ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, OH. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC. |
| REPORT NO | EDO-CE-03-246 |
| PUB DATE | 2003-00-00 |
| NOTE | 4p.; Digest number 246. |
| CONTRACT | ED-99-CO-0013 |
| AVAILABLE FROM | For full text: http://www.ericacve.org/pubs.asp. |
| PUB TYPE | ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073) |
| EDRS PRICE | EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Adult Basic Education; Adults; Basic Skills; Continuation Students; Dropout Programs; Dropouts; Educational Change; Educational Trends; Enrollment Influences; *Enrollment Trends; Federal Aid; *High School Equivalency Programs; Intergenerational Programs; *Literacy Education; Organizational Change; Program Development; State Programs; Teaching Methods; *Youth; Youth Programs |
| IDENTIFIERS | ERIC Digests; General Educational Development Tests |

ABSTRACT

The increase in the number of youth under age 18 enrolling in federally funded adult basic and literacy education programs is a trend that is putting increasing pressures on programs designed to serve an adult population. Documenting the extent of the trend is difficult due to the way in which federal statistics on age of program participants have been compiled and variations in state policies. These multiple factors contribute to the increase: the educational reform movement that increases high school graduation requirements but is often not supported by services needed for youth at risk of dropping out; the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, whose definition of "adult" opens the door for programs in some states to be viable alternatives for youth; and alternative programs that do not meet high school dropout needs. Challenges and questions facing programs include serving youth and adults in the same classes and the appropriateness of instructional materials and teaching methods. Two federally funded adult education programs that are working with youth and have research components offer insight on their impact on young participants. FutureWorks provides an example of how one program can initiate change, and the Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning has published information that demonstrates how changes can be incorporated throughout a system. (Contains 13 references.) (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 478 949

# Youth in Adult Basic and Literacy Education Programs
# ERIC Digest No. 246

Susan Imel

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Center on Education and Training for Employment
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090

CE065168

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Educational Resources Information Center
ERIC DIGEST
no. 246
by Susan Imel
2003
EDO-CE-03-246

# Youth in Adult Basic and Literacy Education Programs

*Wherever adult educators gather, whether at conferences, meetings, or in e-mail discussion groups, a topic on many minds is the challenge of increasing numbers of teenagers enrolled in adult education classes.* (Smith 2002, p. 1).

The increase in the number of youth under the age of 18 enrolling in federally funded adult basic and literacy education programs is a trend that is putting increasing pressures on programs designed to serve an adult population (Hayes 2000). A number of questions and issues surround this trend and administrators and teachers view it from different perspectives (ibid.; Smith 2002). After reviewing some of the trends and factors that are contributing to an increase in youth enrollment, this **Digest** provides an overview of how programs are responding to the challenge of serving young adults.

## Documenting the Trend

Much of the evidence related to the trend of youth under the age of 18 enrolling in federally funded adult education programs is anecdotal in nature. Documenting the extent of the trend is difficult due to the way in which federal statistics on age of program participants have been compiled and variation in state policies (Hayes 2000). Fiscal Year 2000 was the first and most recent year that the number of participants aged 16-18 is shown as a separate category in the state statistics compiled by the Division of Adult Education and Literacy in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education; in that year, 16% of the total participants were in that category (http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/AdultEd/2000age.html). Prior to FY 2000, youth aged 16-18 were included in the category "ages 16-24"; in 1999, 35% of participants were in that category. In 2000, the number of participants aged 16-18 (16%) combined with the number aged 19-24 (25%) totaled 41%, indicating that, overall, the number of younger participants is on the increase, but it is not possible to tell if the increase is among youth aged 16-18. State policies regarding at what age individuals may take the General Educational Development (GED) test as well as who is eligible to be served by adult basic and literacy programs vary: some states have more liberal policies that allow 16-18 year-olds to enroll in programs as a way of preparing for the GED so that they can complete high school (Beckwith 2002; Hayes 2000; Smith 2002). Figures from the GED Testing Service reveal something about the number of youth who potentially may be enrolled in federally funded programs. In 2001, over 26% of those taking the GED were ages 16, 17, or 18, but this figure reflected a slight decrease compared to 2000 (http://www.acenet.edu/calec/ged/whotook-acfm). However, not all of these test takers may have been enrolled in a federally funded preparation program.

Despite the difficulties in documenting the exact numbers of 16-18 year-olds enrolled in adult programs, a number of factors have been identified as contributing to the increase that is occurring in many programs:

- The educational reform movement that is increasing requirements for high school graduation and that is often not supported by the services needed for youth at risk of dropping out (Beckwith 2002; Hayes 2000)
- The requirements of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Title II of the Workforce Investment Act) that define "adult" as those individuals who have attained 16 years of age and who are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law, thus opening the door for programs in some states to be viable alternatives for youth (Smith 2002)
- A lack of understanding of the strong literacy and math skills needed to pass the GED, thus creating a perception that the GED is a "quick fix" for high school dropouts (Beckwith 2002)
- Insufficient alternative programs created by school districts to serve high school dropouts, a lack of knowledge of the alternative programs, and/or the failure of some alternative programs to meet the needs of some high school dropouts (Beckwith 2002; Cochran 2000; Hayes 2000).

Evidently, multiple factors are contributing to the increase of youth enrollments in adult education programs in many areas, and they may vary according to local conditions.

## Programmatic Responses

Just as the reasons for the changes in youth enrollment are many and varied, so are the responses of programs serving youth. General challenges and questions facing programs are addressed first, followed by descriptions of how two programs have addressed the needs of youth.

The challenge of serving youth and adults in the same classes is real for most programs. Although research has shown that mixing adults and youth has many positive results, it may not be beneficial in all cases (Hayes 2000). Many programs simply do not have the resources to create separate classes to serve youth, yet a large number of youth in a class may have a negative impact on both younger and older students (Hayes 2000; Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning [MAAL] 2001). High school dropouts frequently do not have any sense of a positive future (MAAL 2001) and may require more attention, leading to neglect of the older students (O'Neil 2000). Furthermore, "while mixed groups can be richer and dynamic, they can interfere with everyone's learning if there is a popular versus traditional 'culture clash'" (O'Neil 2000, p. 22). Because of how they have been shaped by their social and cultural context, younger learners may not even recognize behaviors that teachers and older learners regard as disrespectful of the teacher's authority (Dirkx 2002).

In her study of youth in adult literacy programs, Hayes (2000) found that programs were using a variety of strategies to deal with the question of integration versus separation. Because of the disruption caused by some youth, a few programs had created entirely separate classes. Most, however, were integrating ages within classes, using such strategies as keeping the proportion of youth in classes relatively low and separating youth from their friends when being together led to negative behavior. Some programs (ibid.; Smith 2002) have developed written attendance and behavior policies that youth must agree to before being admitted to classes.

The appropriateness of instructional materials and teaching methods are also of concern. Can the same materials and approaches be used with both adults and youth? In her study, Hayes (2000) found that programs made few changes in instruction to accommodate youth and reported that "many [respondents] felt that adult education could be more responsive to the needs of youth than the regular high school because it allowed for individualized, self-paced instruction" (p. 97). Many young people, however, are not well served by a format that emphasizes individual work or by content that they do not perceive as relevant (MAAL 2001). Results of focus groups conducted by MAAL revealed that young people want youth-oriented learning materials and desire group instruction, in addition to one-on-one interaction with teachers (Herring 2001). Caring teachers who can relate to their lives are also important (Herring 2001; Malcolmson 2001; Ovens 2002).


BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Published descriptions of how federally funded adult education programs are working with youth are not plentiful. Two programs with research components, however, offer some insight on their impact on young participants. ***FutureWorks*** (Cochran 2000) provides an example of how one program can initiate change, and the Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning (2000, 2001) has published information that demonstrates how changes can be incorporated throughout a system.

- **FutureWorks.** A GED preparation program for teenagers who are at risk, FutureWorks recruits and enrolls youth who have failed in other alternative education programs or at one of four high schools in the Virginia county where the program is located. Ten students, mostly white women, are taught at one time by a teacher and an aide. In practitioner inquiry research conducted by Cochran (2000), students identified the following as important program characteristics: respect for individual needs (e.g., small classroom, individualized instruction, shorter week and school day); supportive climate (e.g., informal classroom climate, teacher advocacy); and alternative opportunities (e.g., opportunity to accomplish their goals through an alternate route). Both the current and former students interviewed for the study indicated that they "felt as if they needed to prove to the establishment, their friends, and their families that they could be successful" (ibid., p. 3). They were not trying to avoid school but just needed an alternative way to pursue education.

- **Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning.** When MAAL of Kansas City, Missouri, found that youth 16-21 years of age represented nearly one-half of the population served by its programs, it adopted the youth cultural competence (YCC) approach to better serve this population. "In practice, YCC means using the values and icons of youth culture, from teen music and heroes to attitudes about sex and drugs, as teaching tools to reach young people who do not respond to traditional ABE [adult basic education] methods" (MAAL 2001, p. 2). Working in partnership with the Youth Development and Research Fund (YDRF), MAAL has provided professional development on YCC principles and practices for teachers in MAAL programs. For programs using the YCC approach, the results are very encouraging. One program, for example, reported an increase in retention rate from 39% to 95% for young adult learners enrolled in a teen-only group and a GED pass rate nearly triple that of previous youth enrollees. Another program increased its retention rate from 40% to 75% after it incorporated YCC principles. MAAL supports the implementation of YCC in a number of ways, including training and professional development, ongoing technical assistance from YDRF, program site visits by YDRF staff, and grants to support programs implementing YCC strategies (MAAL 2002).

## Conclusion

Adult education programs have responded pragmatically to the need to serve youth by adapting their existing programs. At the policy level, questions such as, "Is this the population that federally funded adult education programs should be serving?" (ibid.; Smith 2002) and "Should adult education programs continue to serve as a safety net for those youth who have been failed by a system with far more resources?" (Beckwith 2002; Hayes 2000) have yet to be fully addressed. Adult educators can be proactive in helping shape responses to these questions by working with policymakers to create alternatives for serving young adults in educational programs.

## References


Beckwith, E. J. "What's Up with the Rapid Increase of Young People in GED & Adult Education Programs?" ***STW Programs & Issues*** 1, no. 1 (2002): 3-15.

Cochran, E. ***Future Works: An Alternative Avenue to Success. Practitioner Research Briefs, 1999-2000 Report Series.*** Arlington: Virginia Adult Education Research Network, Arlington Public Schools, 2000. (ED 445 240) http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/Elizabeth_Cochran.pdf

Dirkx, J. M. "Generational Difference and the Problem of Identity in the Adult Education and Community College Classroom." In ***Proceedings of the 21st Midwest Research-to-Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing and Community Education***, DeKalb, Illinois, October 9-11, 2002, edited by R. A. Orem, pp. 114-119. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2002. http://www.cedu.niu.edu/reps/Document/Midwest_Conference_Papers_part1.pdf

Hayes, E. "Youth in Adult Literacy Education Programs." In ***Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy. Vol. 1***, edited by J. Comings, B. Garner, and C. Smith, pp. 74-110. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000. http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/ann_rev/vol1_3.html

Herring, M. "Focus Groups for Young Adults." Unpublished paper prepared for Youth Cultural Competence. Kansas City, MO: Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning, March 2001.

Malcolmson, J. D. "What Works in Youth Literacy and Why?: A Literature Review and Discussion." Unpublished paper prepared for Youth Initiatives Directory, Human Resources and Development Canada, October 2001.

Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning. "Why Young People Aren't Succeeding in Adult Education." In ***Bringing It Home***. Kansas City, MO: Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning, March 2000. http://www.KCLearningWorks.org/documents/bringing_it_home.pdf

Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning. "Teen Dropouts Increasingly Falter in Adult Education Programs." ***Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning News,*** Second Quarter, 2001. http://www.KCLearningWorks.org/documents/layout_june_pages.pdf

Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning. ***Youth Cultural Competence Professional Development Initiative.*** Kansas City, MO: Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning, 2002.

O'Neil, F. "The NMIT Youth Unit: Diverse Programs and Pedagogical Challenges." In ***Literacy for Youth: Programs, Problems and Perspectives***, edited by J. Sanguinetti and M. Jones. Melbourne, Victoria: Language Australia, Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium, and Victorian Centre, 2000. (ED 442 938) http://www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/docs/lityouth.pdf

Ovens, C. ***Literacy for Youth: What Counts as Success in Programs for Youth At-Risk.*** Melbourne, Victoria: Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium, 2002. http://www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/publications/02OvensJune2002.pdf

Sanguinetti, J. "Youth Forum Workshop Groups: Issues and Challenges." In ***Literacy for Youth: Programs, Problems and Perspectives***, edited by J. Sanguinetti and M. Jones. Melbourne, Victoria: Language Australia, Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium, and Victorian Centre, 2000. (ED 442 938) http://www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/docs/lityouth.pdf

Smith, H. V. "The Challenge of Teens in the Adult Education Classroom." ***Literacy Links*** (Newsletter of the Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning) 6, no. 4 (June 2002). http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/newslett/jun02/jun02c.htm



This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. ED-99-CO-0013. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. ***Digests*** may be freely reproduced and are available at <http://ericacve.org/digests.asp>.

***Center on Education and Training for Employment***
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus OH 43210-1090

**U.S. Department of Education**
*Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)*
*National Library of Education (NLE)*
*Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)*

# NOTICE

## Reproduction Basis

| | |
|---|---|
| | This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form. |
| X | This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket"). |